The Literature & Religion of Ancient Egypt.

That the first people who possessed letters in the literal sense, should also be the first people to possess letters in the literary sense, is no more than we should expect. Not, indeed, that the possession of an alphabet necessarily implies literary activity on the part of those who possess it. The Romans engraved their Codes on tablets of stone & brass, & sculptured inscriptions

on their public buildings,
for centuries before they
wrote histories & dramas,
odes & satires. The Oscans,
the Etruscans, & other
early nations of Italy,
never, so far as we know,
got beyond mere inscriptions.
Even the Greeks of the
Ægean, as we are now
just beginning to find out,
were in possession of the
Cadmean alphabet some
five or six centuries before
the time of Homer; &
yet, we have good reason
to believe that the Iliad
was not committed

to writing till 400 years after the death of the poet. Literature is, in fact, the fruit of leisure. Nations which are going through the struggle for existence call for soldiers – not scribes. The bard – the rhapsodist – the extemporaneous singer of war-chants & dirges, is the only representative of literature at that early stage in the history of a people; & it is not till the arts of peace have taken their place side by

side with the arts of war, That poems are written, not sung — that histories are recorded with the pen, not carved out by the sword.

But when we are dealing with the origin & evolution of national literatures, there is yet another factor to be Taken into the account — namely, the possession of a cheap & convenient material upon which to write. This is a very common-place & vulgar necessity; yet it is one of paramount importance. So long as stone

& metal are the only available substances, so long will they be used for inscriptions & state documents only. It is not till papyrus, and parchment, & finally paper become current articles of commerce, that writing as a career or a recreation is even possible. Without papyrus or parchment, we should never have had a literature of Egypt, Greece, or Rome. Without paper, we could never have had the magnificent literary efflorescence

of the Renaissance. Fancy Anacreon & Sappho, Martial & Horace laboriously scratching their poems on tablets of limestone or [redacted] plates of bronze! How the perfume of the roses & the sting of the epigrams, & the aroma of the Sabine wine would have evaporated under such a process!

Well, [redacted] so far as we know, the people of ancient Egypt had [redacted] to make no [redacted] struggle for existence at the outset of their career. Hemmed in

between two vast & pathless deserts, their fertile valley was so strongly fortified by nature herself, that they had little cause to fear danger from without. It is not, in fact, till thirteen royal dynasties, comprising about 200 Kings have passed in shadowy succession across the stage of Egyptian history, that we hear of the Hyksôs invasion.

The Egyptians of the first 12 Dynasties — & indeed, the bulk of the nation at all times — were a pastoral & peaceful people — well

content with their lot in this life, & much occupied with preparations for the next. They were naturally averse to soldiering, & the armies of the great military Pharoahs of the XVIII-th XIX-th & XX-th Dynasties were largely composed of foreign auxiliaries. What the native-born Egyptian most dearly loved was to cultivate his paternal acres, to meditate on morals & religion, & to prepare a splendid tomb for his mummy when the inevitable summons

should come.

And he not only loved meditation, but he loved to record his meditations in writing for the benefit of posterity.

How early the Egyptians began to cut & press the stalks of the papyrus plant in order to make a material for the use of the scribe, it is impossible to say. But we know that material to have been already employed for literary purposes in the time of the Third Dynasty, that is to say;

some 4000 years
before the Christian
era. There is at this
moment in the archives
of the Bibliotheque Na-
-tionale of Paris, a papyrus
written by a scribe of
the XI.th Dynasty, which
contains copies of two much
more ancient documents,
one dating from the
Third, & one from the
Sixth Dynasty. This most
precious papyrus is the
only XI.th Dynasty papyrus
known. It has been well
styled "The Oldest Book
in the World"; & it is,

at all events, the oldest papyrus yet discovered.

You will observe that I say it is the oldest papyrus — not the oldest specimen of Egyptian writing, yet discovered. If we turn to inscriptions cut in stone — as, for instance, to the famous Second Dynasty tablet of the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford — we can point to writing full two centuries earlier. But stone-cut inscriptions, even when

they run to a considerable length, are with difficulty classed under the head of literature. When we speak of the literature of a nation, we are not thinking of inscriptions on obelisks & triumphal arches. We mean such literature as may be stored in a library & possessed by individuals. In a word, we mean Books — books, whether in the form of clay cylinders, or papyrus rolls, or any other portable material.

Now, the Egyptians were the first people of the ancient world who had a literature of this kind — who wrote books & read books — who possessed books, & loved them. And their literature, which grew, & flourished, & decayed with the language in which it was written was of a most varied character — scientific, secular, & religious. It comprised moral and educational treatises, state-papers,

works on geometry, medicine, astronomy, & magic; travels, tales, fables, heroic poems, love-songs, & essays in the form of letters; hymns, dirges, rituals, & last, not least, that extraordinary collection of of prayers, invocations, & religious formulæ known as "The Book of the Dead." Some of these writings are older the Pyramids — some are as recent as the time when Egypt had fallen so low as to be but a Roman province.

Between these two extremes lie more than 5000 years. Of this immense body of literature we possess the scattered wrecks — mere flotsam & jetsam left stranded on the shores of Time. Even these disjecta membra, though they represent so small a proportion of the whole, far exceed in mere bulk all that remains to us of the literature of the Greeks. Every year,

moreover, adds to our wealth. No less than a dozen papyri of the remote XIIth Dynasty period were found by Mr Petrie last season in the ruins of an obscure little town in the Fayûm. You may judge how precious these are when I tell you that not more than three or four documents of that period were previously known; & that Abraham's visit to Egypt is believed to have taken place during the reign

of a Pharoah of this
line. In the course
of the same season
& of the season before
Mr Petrie discovered
at least as many
papyri of [redacted] later dy-
-nasties, besides hundreds
of fragments of Greek papyri
of Ptolemaic & Roman times.
These consist chiefly of
accounts, deeds, royal edicts
& the like, not forgetting
a magnificent fragment
containing nearly the
whole of the Second Book
of the Iliad. Nor is this
the first

time that Homer has been found in Egypt. The three oldest Homeric texts previously known come from the land of the Pharaohs. To those three, Mr Petrie has now added a fourth. Other papyri found within the present century contain fragments of Sappho, Anacreon, Thespis, Pindar Timotheus; & all — all, without exception, — come from graves. The great Homer papyrus of last year was rolled

up as a pillow (19
for the head of its
former owner — &
its former owner was
a young, & apparently
a beautiful woman,
with little ivory teeth
& long, silky black hair.
Her head, & her lovely
hair are now in the South
Kensington Museum,
London, & her Homer
is in the Bodleian Library
at Oxford; & we know
neither her name nor
her history.

But I am not here

this evening to enumerate the transcripts of foreign classics which have been found on Egyptian soil. My subject is the native literature of that ancient & wonderful people whose immemorial home was the valley of the Nile.

Now the two most important subjects in the literature of a [redacted] nation are undoubtedly its history & its religion & up to the present time nothing in the shape of

an Egyptian history
of Egypt has been found.
We have historical tables,
historical poems, chronicles
of campaigns, lists of
conquered cities, & records
of public works sculptured
on stelæ, written on
papyrus, & carved on
the walls of Temples &
Tombs. But these are
the materials of history
— the bricks, & blocks,
& beams with which
the historian builds up
his structure. Brugsch
in his History of Egypt

has brought together all such documents as were known at the time when he wrote it; but no one can read that excellent work without perceiving that it is but a collection of inscriptions — not a consecutive narrative. Whole reigns are sometimes represented by only a name & a date — whole dynasties are occasionally blank. This is no fault of the learned author.

It simply means that no monuments of those times have been dis-covered. Yet we cannot doubt that histories of Egypt were written at various periods by qualified scholars. We know of one — the work of Manetho, who was High Priest & Keeper of the archives in the great Temple of Ra at Heliopolis, in the time of Ptolomy Philadelphus some 250 years before our Era. Manetho, though

a true-born Egyptian, wrote his history in Greek, the native tongue of the Ptolemies, & the language of the court; & he wrote it, moreover, by the royal command. Now the sacred college of Heliopolis was the most ancient home of learning in Egypt. Its foundation dated back to the ages before history. The oldest fragments embedded in the Book of the Dead being of Heliopolitan origin. Manetho had therefore the most venerable, &

probably the largest library in Egypt at his command; & whatever histories may have been written before his time), we may be very certain that his was the latest & the best. But of that precious work not a single copy has come down to our time. A few invaluable fragments are preserved in the form of quotations, by later writers — by Josephus, for instance, in his "Antiquities of the Jews"; by Eusebius;

& by various chronologers:
but the work itself
has perished — perished
with the libraries in
which it was treasured
& the scholars by whom
it was studied.

Still, there is always
room for hope in Egypt.
& it may yet be reserved
for some fortunate
explorer to discover
the grave of a long-for-
-gotten Scribe whose head
shall be pillowed, not
upon a transcript of
Homer, but upon a
copy of the lost History

of Manetho.

Of the numerous historic documents which remain to us, the Three most interesting are perhaps the celebrated Chant of Victory of King Thothmes III — the Epic of Pentaur — & The great international treaty between Rameses II, & the allied Princes of Syria.

The first of these is engraved on a black granite Tablet found in the great Temple of Karnak, at Thebes. It records the conquests of Thothmes III?; and

Thothmes III was the Alexander of ancient Egypt. He was possessed by the same insatiable thirst for conquest — by the same storm-driven restlessness. Ever on the march, & ever victorious, he conquered the known world of his time. It was his magnificent boast that he planted the frontiers of Egypt where he pleased — & he did so. Southward as far, apparently, as the great equatorial lakes which have been rediscovered in our time; Northward

to the islands of the Ægean & the upper waters of the Euphrates — over Syria & Sinai, Mesopotamia & Arabia in the East — over Libya & the North African coast, as far as Scherschell in Algeria, on the West, he carried fire & sword, & the terror of the Egyptian name. He was by far the greatest warrior-King of Egyptian history; & his "chant of victory" — though rhapsodical & Oriental in style — does not exaggerate the facts. This chant,

— written of course by the Laureate of the day — is the finest example extant of the heroic poetry of Ancient Egypt. For the Egyptians, notwithstanding the poverty of their grammar & the cumbrous structure of their language, had poetry & poetry of a high order. It was not like our poetry. It had neither rhyme nor metre; but it had rhythm. Like the chants of the Troubadours and Trouvères, it was largely alliterative — cadenced — symmetrical.

It abounded in imagery — in antithesis — in parallelisms. The same word, or the same phrase, was repeated at measured intervals. In short, it had style & music; & although the old Egyptian language is far more literally dead than the languages of Greece & Rome, that music is still faintly audible to the ear of such as care to listen to its distant echo.

A twofold bas-relief group at the top of the

Tablet of Thothmes III represents the king in adoration before Amen-Ra; & the poem was evidently composed in commemoration of the opening of the Hall of Columns added by this Pharaoh to the Temple of Amen at Karnak. It is the God who speaks. He begins with a few lines of prose; thus: —

The Discourse of Amen-Ra
Lord of Thrones.

"Come unto me! Tremble thou with joy. Oh my son,

my avenger! Ra-men-
-kheper endowed with
life everlasting! My
heart is dilated on
beholding thy joyous
entrance into my
Temple. I am established
in my Abode. I give
thee victory & power
over all the nations.
I have spread the fear
of thee throughout all
lands, & thy Terror unto
the limits of the four
props of heaven.
I stretch forth my
arm, & I seize the

people of Nubia
in myriads, & the
nations of the earth
in millions, & I
bind them for thee
in sheaves! I have
cast thine enemies under
thy sandals, & thou
hast trampled their
chiefs under thine heel.
By my command, the
world in its length &
its breadth, from North
to South, from East to
West, is thy dwelling
place!"

After more in the
same

strain, the God breaks suddenly into rhythmic verse:—

1. "I came! I gave thee might to fell the princes of Taha. I cast them beneath thy feet, marching across their territories. I made them to behold thy majesty ~~in the~~ as a Lord of Light, illuminating their faces, even in my own likeness!

2. I came! I gave thee might to

to fell the nations
of Asia. Thou hast
reduced to captivity
the chiefs of the
Rotennu. I made
them to behold thy
majesty in the splendor
of thy panoply of war,
weilding thy weapons,
& combatting in thy
war-chariot!

3. I came! I gave thee
might to fell the people
of the far East! Thou
hast traversed the pro-
-vinces of the land
of the Gods.

I made them to
behold thee like unto
the star of morning,
shedding radiance
& showering dew.!
4. I came! I gave
thee might to fell the
nations of the West!
Phœnicia & Cyprus hav
thee in terror. I made
them to behold ~~thee~~
thy majesty even as a
young Bull, bold of
heart, horned, and
unconquerable!
5 I came! I gave thee
might to fell the dwellers

in the islands. Those
who live in the midst
of the great deep hear
& dread thy war-cry!
I made them to behold
thy majesty even as
the crocodile, master of
the waters, whom none
dare approach!

7. I came! I gave thee
might to fell the people
of Libya. The isles of
the Danaans are under
thy will. I made them
to behold thy majesty
as a furious lion

crouching over their corpses, & stalking through their valleys."

The poem of Pentaur, which is sometimes called the Egyptian Iliad is in a quite different style. It is much longer than the chant of Thothmes. It is full of incident & dialogue; & it records — not a mere catalogue of victories — but the events of a single campaign, & the deeds of a single hero. That hero is Rameses II

& the campaign thus celebrated was undertaken in the fifth year of his reign, against the allied forces of Syria & Asia Minor.

Having marched as far as Shabtoon, on the river Orontes, without encountering any opposition, the King had arrived within sight of the fortified city of Kadesh, when he suddenly found himself cut off from the main body of his army, & penned in between the city-walls

& the river. In front were massed the combined forces of the princes of Carchemish, Kadesh, & Aleppo, together with a large body of Trojan, [redacted] Lycian, Dardanian & other Græco-Asiatic tribes. Behind him, he beheld a solid phalanx of 2,500 Hittite war-chariots, commanded by the Hittite King in person. Thus surrounded Rameses, with right royal & desperate valour, charged the ranks of the enemy's chariots. Six times, with

only his household troops at his back, he broke their lines, spreading disorder & terror, & driving many into the river. Then — just at the right moment — one of his Tardy brigades came hurrying up, & forced the enemy to retreat. A pitched battle was fought the next day, & the Egyptians won a great victory. Such would appear to be the plain unvarnished facts. The poet, however, takes some liberties with

the facts — as poets are apt to do, even now. — He abolishes the household troops, & leaves Rameses to fight the whole field single-handed. Nor is the Deus ex machina wanting — that stock device which the Greek dramatists borrowed from Egyptian models. Amen himself comes to the aid of Pharaoh — just as the Gods of Olympus do battle for their favorite heroes on the field of Troy.

Do not be alarmed.
I am not about to in-
flict an epic upon
you. I but ask per-
mission to read a
few passages from
this poem, which is
certainly the most cele-
brated masterpiece of
Egyptian literature.

I take up the narra-
tive at that critical
point where the Hittites
have executed their flank
~~manoeuvre~~ movement,
& isolated Rameses
from his army.

"Then came messengers with evil tidings to the King; & he arose and grasped his weapons, & donned his armour like Baal [redacted], the war-god in his hour of wrath. And he put his horses to their speed, & rushed into the ranks of the Hittites.

Alone he went — none other was beside him. And lo! he was surrounded by 2.500 chariots — his retreat

cut off by all the fighting men of Aradus, of Mysia, of Aleppo, of Caria, of Kadesh & of Lycia. They were three on each chariot, & massed in one solid phalanx."

Here the form changes & Rameses breaks forth into an impassioned appeal to Amen.

"None of my princes are with me!" he cries. "My soldiers have abandoned me — my horsemen have fled —

— there are none
to combat beside me!
Where art thou, Oh
Amen my father?
Hath the father forgotten
his son? Behold! Have
I done aught without
thee? Have I not walked
in thy ways, & waited
on thy words? Have I
not built thee temples
of enduring stone?
Have I not dedicated
to thee sacrifices of
tens of thousands of
oxen, & of every rare
& sweet scented wood?

Have I not given thee
the whole world in
tribute? I call upon
thee, Oh Amen, my
father! I invoke thee!
Behold, I am alone,
& all the nations of
the earth are leagued
against me! My foot-
soldiers & my chariot-
men have abandoned
me! I call, & none
hear my voice! But
Amen is more than
millions of archers —
more than hundreds of
thousands of cavalry!

The might of men is as nothing — Amen is greater than all.'"

Then, suddenly, Rameses becomes aware that Amen has heard his cry — is near him — is leading him to victory.

"'Lo! my voice hath resounded as far as Her-monthis!' Amen comes to my call. He gives me his hand — I shout aloud for joy, hearing his voice behind me!"

And now the God speaks. "Oh, Rameses, I am here!

It is I — thy father — the Lord of might who loveth valour. Thus be my will accomplished!"

And Rameses speaks again.

"Like Menthu, I let fly my arrows to right & left, & mine enemies go down! I am as Baal in his wrath! The 2.500 chariots which encompass me are dashed to pieces under the hoofs of my horses. Not one of their warriors has raised his hand to smite me. Their hearts die in

their breasts — their limbs fail — they can neither hurl the javelin nor weild the spear. Headlong I drive them to the water's edge.! Headlong they plunge, as the crocodile.! They fall upon their faces, one above the other, & I slay them in the mass.! No time have they to turn back — no time to look behind them.! He who falls rises never again.!"

Then the Hittites & the Kadeshites,

& the warriors of Carchemish & Aleppo turned & fled, crying aloud — "It is no man who is in the midst of us! It is Sutekh the glorious! It is Baal in the flesh! Alone — alone, he slays hundreds of thousands! Let us fly for our lives!"

And they fled; & the King pursued them as he were a flame of fire!"

I have much abridged these passages; but they give the best example

I can offer you of the epic style of Ancient Egypt. That style was singularly capricious — narrative & dialogue succeeding each other, according to the exigencies of the situation. These changes are unmarked by any of those devices whereby the modern writer assists his reader; they must therefore have been emphasised by the reciter.

If I may venture upon so modern a word in connection with so ancient

a composition, I would say that Rameses published this poem in a most costly manner, with ~~most~~ magnificent illustrations; & he did so upon a scale which puts our modern publishers to shame. His imperial edition was issued in sculptured stone, & illustrated with bas-relief subjects gorgeously coloured by hand. ~~I~~ Three copies of this edition have survived the wreck of ages — & we know not how many have perished. These three ~~four~~

are carved on the pylon walls of the great Temples of Luxor & the Ramesseum at Thebes, & in the main Hall of the great rock-cut Temple of Aboo Simbel in Nubia. One of the tableaux in this hall is 50 feet in length by about 40 feet in height, & it contains many thousands of figures. In these temple-copies, the poem ~~is~~ is sculptured in hieroglyphs. There is also a copy of it, without illustrations, carved on a side-wall

of the great Temple of Karnak.

But there were also popular editions of this immortal poem — copies written on papyrus, in the hieratic character by professional scribes; & one of these copies is in the British Museum, while a fragment of another copy being in the Museum of the Louvre.

The scientific literature of the Egyptians is extremely interesting, inasmuch as it illustrates that eager spirit of enquiry

which is the mainspring of intellectual effort, & without which there can be no intellectual progress. But its value to us is, of course, purely archæological. We have nothing to learn from these earliest pioneers of astronomy - of mathematics - of medicine. We smile at their childlike & fanciful speculations; but we are sometimes amazed to find how near they were to grasping many truths which we had regarded as the hard-won prizes of modern research.

This is especially true of Egyptian astronomy. Their observations were singularly exact. They understood perfectly well the difference between the fixed stars & the planets, the first being "the genii which never move", & the last, "the genii which never rest." They even knew that our own earth forms part of the planetary system, & is subject to the same law of motion. In a hieratic inscription of the pyramid-period, for instance,

it is said that "the Earth navigates the celestial ocean in like manner with the Sun & the Stars." Again, in a re-markable passage of the Great Harris papyrus we read how Ptah, the primordial God, "moulded man, created the Gods, made the sky, & formed the Earth revolving in Space". Unhappily, no papyrus treating of astro-nomy has yet been discovered but zodiacs, calendars, & astronomical tables showing

the divisions of the
year, the phases of the
moon, & the dates ~~of~~
~~the dates~~ & hours of the
rising & setting of certain
planets, abound on the
walls of temples & tombs.
Two mathematical papyri
have been found. One
was discovered by Mr Petrie
in the ruins of a buried
house in Tanis. This papyrus
is the property of the Egypt
Exploration Fund; & we
have for the present lent
it to Professor Revillout, who
has undertaken

to translate it. The other mathematical papyrus was found by Mr Rhind at Thebes. It belongs to the British Museum, & has been translated by Dr Eisenlohr of Heidelberg. This curious document treats of plane trigonometry & the measurement of solids, & it contains not only a system of reckoning by decimals, but a series of problems for solution by the student. Of the practical geometry of the Egyptians, we have a

magnificent example in the Pyramids, which could never have been erected by builders who were not thoroughly conversant with the art of measuring ~~Solids~~ Surfaces & calculating the bulk & weight of ~~Solids~~ materials.

Works on medicine abounded in Egypt from the remotest times; & the great medical library of Memphis, which was of immemorial antiquity was yet in existence

when Galen visited the Valley of the Nile, in the 2d Cenry before our era. The Egyptians seem indeed to have especially prided themselves on their skill as physicians; & the art of healing was held in such high esteem that even Kings made it their study. Teta, the Second King of the First Dynasty (the immediate successor of Mena) is the reputed author of a treatise

on anatomy. He also covered himself with glory by the invention of an infallible hair wash, which, like a dutiful son, he is said to have prepared especially for the benefit of his mother.

No less than five medical papyri have come down to our time; the finest being the celebrated Ebers papyrus, bought at Thebes by Dr Ebers in 1874. This papyrus contains 110 pages, each

page consisting of about
22 lines of bold hieratic
writing. It may be
described as an encyclopedia
of medicine as known
& practised by the Egyptians
of the XVIII th Dynasty;
& it contains prescriptions
for all kinds of diseases
— some borrowed from
Syrian medical lore,
& some of such great
antiquity that they are
ascribed to the mythologic
ages, when the Gods yet
reigned personally upon
earth. Among others,

we are given the recipe for an application whereby Osiris cured Ra of the headache.

The Egyptians attached great importance to these ancient medical works, which were regarded as final. The physician who faithfully followed their rules of treatment might kill or cure with impunity; but if he ventured to treat the patient according to his own notions, & if that patient died, he paid

for the experiment with his life. Seeing, however, what the canonical remedies were, the marvel is that anybody ever recovered from anything. Raw meat – horrible mixtures of nitre, beer, milk & blood boiled up & swallowed hot – the bile of certain fishes – & the bones, fat, & skins of all kinds of unsavoury creatures, such as vultures, bats, lizards & crocodiles, were among their choicest remedies.

What we suffer at the hands of the faculty in this Nineteenth Century is bad enough; but I think we may rejoice that we have escaped the learned practitioners of Memphis & Thebes.

The Moral Philosophy of the Ancient Egyptians is peculiarly interesting to us of a later age. It is not a profound Philosophy. On the contrary it is simple, practical, & very much to the point. We have several papyri

containing collections of moral precepts; & most of them are in the form of aphorisms on the conduct of life addressed by a father to his son. Such are the maxims of the scribe Ani, the maxims of Ptah-hotep, & others. The maxims of Ptah-hotep are contained in a papyrus which has been styled "The Oldest Book in the World," & is in the French national collection. This papyrus

dates from the XIIth Dynasty, & is copied from a yet more ancient document of the Vth Dynasty written some 3800 years before our era.

"Be not proud because of thy learning", saith Ptah-hotep. "Converse with the ignorant as freely as with the scholar; for the gates of knowledge should never be closed.

If thou art exalted after having been low-

if thou art rich after having been ~~needed~~ needy, harden not thy heart because of thy elevation. Thou hast but become a steward of the good things belonging to the Gods."

~~The Scribe Ani, who lived about 1000 years later than Nam. Adds preach~~

"If thou wouldst be of good conduct & dwell apart from evil, beware of bad temper; for it contains

the germs of all wickedness. When a man takes justice for his guide & walks in her ways, there is no room in his soul for bad temper."

These wise words were written by Ptah-hotep when — as he himself tells us, he had reached the patriarchal age of 110 years.

The scribe Ani, who lived about 1000 years later, preaches the same just & gentle Gospel:—

He says:—

Beware of giving pain by the words of thy mouth, & make not thyself to be feared.

He who speaks evil reaps evil."

Good manners are the minor morality of life, & Ani, who was a man of the world as well as a sage, has something to say also of etiquette:—

"Do not remain sitting when thy elder, or thy superior is standing.

"If a deaf man is

present, do not multiply words; it is better thou keep silent.

It is such brief & simple sayings as these which bring us nearest to the hearts of the old Egyptian people. We see them "as in a glass"; & we see them at their best — a gentle, kindly, law-abiding race, anxious to cultivate peace & good will, & to inculcate those rules of good conduct whereby their own lives had been guided.

The Egyptians would have been unlike all other Orientals if they had not loved stories & songs; yet it was not till the first ancient Egyptian romance was discovered that anyone dreamed of a popular literature of the days of the Pharaohs. We had, I suppose, been so accustomed to think of the ancient Egyptians as mummies, that we scarcely remembered they were men. Those mummies, it is

True, had once been alive — but alive in a solemn, leathery, unsympathetic way, as became a people who were destined to be spiced, bandaged, & ultimately consigned to glass cases in modern Museums. An ancient Egyptian in love, chanting a sonnet to his mistress's eyebrow & accompanying himself on the lute — well, we should have blushed to think of him in connection with so trivial an occupation! And yet,

within the last five-(77
& thirty years, no less
than fifteen or sixteen
romantic stories, &
almost as many love
-songs, have been brought
to light. Some had been
lying, undeciphered, in
the learned dust of
various Museums. Others
were found in graves,
buried, strange to say,
with the mummies of
their former owners.
Some are as old as the
XII th Dynasty; others are
as recent as the time of

Alexander & the Ptolemies.

In some we recognise stories familiar to us from childhood in old nursery tales, & in the Arabian Nights Entertainments. in others, the originals of legends which Herodotus with a credulity peculiar to the learned, accepted for history. Even some of the fables attributed to Æsop are drawn from Egyptian sources. The Lion & the Mouse, the Dispute of the Stomach & the Members & others, have been

found in papyri older by 800 years than the famous dwarf who is supposed to have invented them. When, however, we remember that tradition associates the name of Æsop with that of Rhodopis who lived at Naukratis in the time of Amasis, we seem to be within touch of the actual connection between Æsop & Egypt.

Of this same Rhodopis it is said in an ancient Egyptian story repeated

by Herodotus, that an eagle flew away with her sandal while she was bathing, & dropped it at the feet of the Egyptian King at Memphis. Struck by its beauty, he sent out his messengers in all directions to find the owner of this little sandal; & when they had found her, he made her his queen. In another Egyptian story called The Tale of the Two Brothers a lock of hair from the head

of a beautiful damsel
is carried to Egypt by
the river, & its perfume
is so ravishing that the
King despatches his scouts
throughout the length &
breadth of the land, that
they may bring to him the
owner of this lock of hair.
She is found of course, &
he makes her his bride.
Now in these tales we have
certainly the germ of Cin-
derella. In another tale
called "The taking of Joppa"
we meet with what is unques-
tionably the original source

of the leading incident in the familiar story of Ali Baba & the Forty Thieves. One Tahuti, a general of Thothmes III, who is sent to lay seige to the city of Joppa, conveys 200 of his soldiers in 200 big jars — fills 300 other jars with cords & fetters — loads 500 other soldiers with the 500 other jars, & sends them into the city, in the character of captives. Once inside the gates, the bearers liberate & arm their comrades,

take the place, & make all the inhabitants prisoners. Now, although the King & the general are both historical personages, & although Joppa figures in the lists of cities conquered by Thothmes III, the story itself is evidently pure romance. As for the big jars with their human cargoes, they are clearly the forefathers of the jars which housed the 40 thieves. We turn to another story called "The Doomed Prince" & we are at once reminded

of the Story of Prince Agib & the Loadstone Mountain. After years of hope deferred, a King & Queen are blessed with a beautiful son. The 7 Hathors — who play the part of fairy godmothers in these old Egyptian stories, predict that the prince will die from the bite of a crocodile, a serpent, or a dog. The King accordingly builds a castle on the top of a lofty mountain, & there makes a state-prisoner of his son. His precautions are,

of course, in vain. The young man escapes from durance vile & becomes the husband of a lovely princess & the master of a faithful dog. The princess kills the serpent; the dog kills the crocodile, — & although the end of the story is unfortunately lost, it is evident that the dog, by some fatal accident, will fulfil his master's doom — just as the doom of Agib is fulfilled by his devoted friend. Another tale of extreme antiquity, entitled

86/ "The Shipwrecked Mariner"

tells of a seaman cast on the shores of a desolate island abounding in delicious fruits & inhabited by a limited population of 75-amiable & intelligent serpents. The head of this charming family was 30 cubits long. His body was encrusted with gold and lapis lazuli, & nature had adorned him with a magnificent beard. He talks like a book — treats the seaman with distinguished hospitality,

& when a ship comes that way, dismisses his guest with gifts of perfumes, incense, rare woods, elephant-tusks, baboons, & all kinds of precious things. Here is probably the starting-point of our dear old friend, Sindbad the Sailor, who was also cast upon an island of serpents.

In others of these ancient fictions, King Khufu the builder of the Great Pyramid; Prince Khaemuas the favorite son of Rameses the Great;

/ King Amasis, who gave Naukratis to the Greeks — & even the great Alexander himself, figure as part of the dramatis personæ.

As you see, we have quite a Franklin Square Library of sensation novels, historical romances and fairy tales of the times of the Pharaohs & the Ptolemies.

Of the popular poetry of those far-off times I have not time to give you more than a couple of specimens — the one

a love-song, from a papyrus in the British Museum — the other a rustic ditty supposed to be sung by the driver of a pair of oxen while they tread out the corn on the threshing-floor.

The love-song, I should premise, is sung by a girl to her lover. Each Strophe begins with an invocation to a flower — thus curiously resembling the Stornelli of the Tuscan peasantry, of which every verse begins & ends with

a similar invocation to some familiar flower.

"Oh flower of henna!
My heart stands still in thy presence.
I have made mine eyes brilliant for thee with Kohl.
When I behold Thee, I fly to Thee, Oh my Beloved!
Oh, Lord of my heart, Sweet is this hour. An hour passed with thee is worth an hour of eternity!

"Oh, Flower of pome- (91
-granite!

Fain would I be to thee as the garden in which I have planted flowers & sweet-smelling shrubs! — the garden watered by pleasant runlets & refreshed by the North breeze.

Here let us walk, Oh, my Beloved, hand in hand, our hearts filled with joy.

Better than food — better than drink is it to behold thee. To

92 behold thee — & to
behold thee again!

This is literally "the old, old story"; & the story this time is yet older than the song.

Our threshing chant dates from about 1650 years before the Christian era. It is carved on the walls of a Tomb at El Kab, in Upper Egypt, & it belongs to the early years of the XVIII.th Dynasty.

In the wall-painting which illustrates the text we see the oxen at work just as in the Egypt of to-day — treading in a measured circle, with the driver seated on his revolving stool in the middle.

It is a simple chant of but four lines many times repeated. We know not the air to which it was sung; but no one who has listened to the monotonous

95 chants of the Egyptian
labourers as they ply
the shadoof ~~or Persian~~
~~Hurdy-Gurdy~~ or the water-
wheel, can fail to be
struck by their evident
antiquity. I do not
doubt that the cadenced
chant intoned of old
by Pahiri's labourers
survives among those
which I have so often
listened as our boat
glided along the broad
river.

These are the words (76

"Thresh the corn, Oh
ye oxen!
Thresh for yourselves,
Thresh for yourselves
Oh oxen!
The fodder for eating,
The grain for your
master!

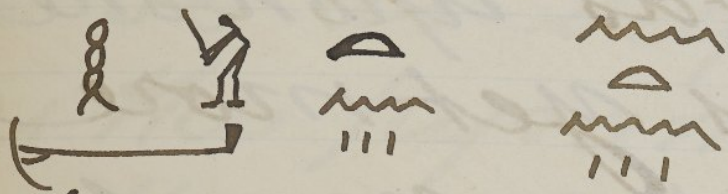
It has been thus paraphrased:—

Hie along oxen,
Tread the corn faster—
The straw for yourselves,
The grain for your
master!

97/ And now, perhaps, — as a matter of mere curiosity — you may like to hear how these words actually sounded in the mouths of the men who sang them 3540 years ago.

The old tongue is strange enough to our modern ears; but thanks to its close relation to the Coptic, & to the researches of modern Egyptologists, we are enabled to

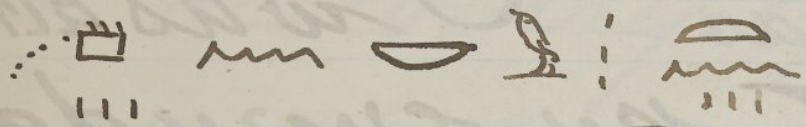
call back its far-off (98
echoes :—


(bis)

Hi-ten enten.!
Hi-ten enten!

Aha-u! Aha-u!
Hi-ten enten! Hi-ten enten!

Tehēu er annu!



Shesu en Nebuten
Aha-u! Aha-u!

—//—

99 I cannot leave this subject without saying a few words upon one which is yet more important — namely, the religion of these ancient moralists. But it is a subject so many-sided, so complicated, so imperfectly understood, that I approach it with considerable reluctance. Every year — I was almost going to say, every day — we find ourselves compelled to abandon some long established theory which

up to that moment we had believed to to be as self-evident as the pyramids, & as well understood as the law of gravitation. What I say to you, therefore, to-day may be obsolete a year, or a month hence. The opening of a tomb — the discovery of a papyrus may at any moment put us in possession of religious texts older than the oldest yet

known, & subversive perhaps, of our best-founded assumptions. This is precisely what happened when the pyramids of Unas, Teta, & other very early kings were excavated ten years ago. Because the Great Pyramids of Gizeh are destitute of inscriptions, it had been rashly concluded that all pyramids must be blank. Great, therefore was the stupefaction of Mariette, under whose

direction they were opened, when the sepulchral chambers & passages of this group were found to be lined with drawn prayers & invocations, some of which are more ancient than any religious texts previously known. Again, it had been laid down as one of the fundamental facts of the Egyptian religion that certain Gods whose renown was great at a later period, were as yet unborn, so to speak, in

the time of the Pyramid kings. Thebes was not founded till the beginning of the XI th Dynasty, & Amen was the great God of Thebes — Consequently Amen had no existence when the pyramids of Unas, & Teta, & Pepi, of the VI th Dynasty were built. But when those Pyramids were laid open, Amen was found there as a member of the cycle of great deities. We cannot, in fact, exercise too much caution in formulating general

rules, or in making use of elastic definitions. We speak, for instance, of the Egyptian religion but there is not, to my thinking, a much more misleading phrase. Just as Professor Revillout has said of the Egyptian language, that it is not one language, but a whole family of languages, so I would say of the Egyptian religion, that it is not one religion, but a whole family of religions. This family springs, it is true,

from one very ancient stock, but it branches out into innumerable varieties. It is not too much to say that there was in Egypt a religion of the Pyramid period, a religion of the Theban period, a religion of Saïs, a religion of the Ptolemaic age, a popular religion, a sacerdotal religion, a religion of polytheism, a religion of Pantheism, a religion of monotheism, & a religion of Platonic philosophy. And these religions,

observe, were not revolutionary
— the new did not drive
out the old, as the bud
pushes off the dead leaf
in autumn. On the
contrary, the Egyptians,
who were nothing if not
conservative, clung with
the strictest fidelity to
the old, even while ardently
embracing the new. It
did not matter in the
least if the dogmas of
one school were diametrically
opposed to the dogmas
of half a dozen other
schools — they continued

to believe them all.

The one great & crucial question — the question which we are most keenly concerned to resolve — is whether the Egyptians believed in one God, or many gods. In Ra, the supreme solar deity, are we to recognise the Egyptian synonym for Almighty God, the maker of heaven & earth & all that in them is? Are the other deities of the Egyptian Pantheon mere personifications of his ~~creative powers?~~ divine

attributes? Does Khnum represent his creative power? Does Amen, the hidden one, signify his unsearchable mystery? Does, Thoth, the Ibis-headed God of letters typify his wisdom — & the Bull Apis, his strength — & the jackal Anubis, his swiftness? Are these animal-headed, bird-headed & reptile-headed forms mere hieroglyphs, of which the secret meaning is the unity & omnipresence

of God? This theory
was elaborated in the
first instance by M. Pierret,
& it has been still further
developed by Dr Brugsch
in his recent work
on "The Religion &
Mythology of the Ancient
Egyptians." As it is the
most attractive exposition
of the Egyptian Pantheon,
so it is undoubtedly
the most popular; &
I therefore doubly regret
that I am unable to
follow M. Pierret & Dr
Brugsch in their proposed

solution of this deeply
interesting problem.
But that solution, as
it appears to me, is
wholly inadmissible.
It is founded on the
assumption that the
religion of the Egyptians
was, from first to last
absolutely homogeneous,
& that in all its complex
developments it merely
presented varying aspects
of one simple, funda-
mental, & God-given
Truth. In this sense
all the Gods of Egypt

are one & the same
— the name merely
changing with the seat
of worship. Animal
worship is mere
symbolism; & Knum
Sebek, Horus. Thoth,
Anubis, & the rest, are
but reflections of an
omnipresent Deity.

But is it possible
seriously to believe this
beautiful theory? Is
it not a great deal
too good to be true?
The Egyptians were
unquestionably the most

wonderful people of antiquity; but they would have been infinitely more wonderful had they started in life with notions so just, so philosophic, so exalted as these? The earliest Egyptian monuments to which we can assign a definite date are the monuments of a people already highly civilised, & in the possession of an alphabetic system of writing, a grammar, a government & a religion.

It must have taken long ages for them to arrive at this advanced stage of their national development; & of those ages, a few vague traditions & the names of three Dynasties of Kings have alone survived. Yet there must have been a time when these people were mere unlettered barbarians, like the forefathers of other nations. They did not spring, fully civilised,

from the mud of the (114
inundation, like Athena
from the head of Zeus.
Now, as a matter of
fact, the barbarian
origin of the Egyptians
is more distinctly traceable
than the barbarian
origin of any other
highly civilised nation
of antiquity. It is traceable
in their laws, in their
customs, & even in their
costume#. Above all,
it is traceable in their
religion. The proof,
ladies & gentlemen,

lies, as it were, at your own doors here in America. You have but to turn your eyes to the far West, in order to see the living solution of some of our most puzzling Egyptian problems. Just as the Northern half of this great Continent was originally possessed by tribes of N. American Indians, so the land of Egypt, in the ages before history, was divided into many small

territories, each territory peopled by an independant clan. The Red man had — & has — his totems or clan crests — these totems being sometimes animals, as the Bear, the Wolf, the Beaver, the Deer; & sometimes birds, as the Snipe, the Hawk, the Heron. So, in like manner, the pre-historic tribes of ancient Egypt will have had their totems taken from the familiar beasts & birds of the Nile Valley — the jackal,

117 the crocodile, the ibis, & so forth. Now, a distinctive appellation is one of the first necessities of life, whether savage or civilised; & in an age when proper names, & the occupations from which proper names are largely derived, are yet unknown, the tribal name is of extreme importance. For this tribal name, the savage naturally adopts that of some creature whose strength subtlety, swiftness, or

fearlessness may symbolise such qualities in himself. I have specified the North American Indian in this connection because he is your own near neighbour; but these facts are true of barbarian & semi-civilised races in all parts of the world. The Bechuanas of South Africa, the Kols of Khota Nagpar in Asia, the Yakats of Siberia, in Northern Europe the aborigines of Australia are divided into clans,

each clan being affiliated to some beast, bird, fish, or reptile. They all regard the totem animal as sacred. They forbear to eat it; & if compelled in self defence to kill it, they ask its pardon for the act.

Here, Then, we have the origin of animal-worship, animal-worship being the direct outcome of totemism.

Now, what is true of these American, S. African Asiatic,

European & Australian tribes must surely be true also of the prehistoric Egyptians. They began with Totemism: — the Bull-clan at Memphis, the Crocodile-clan in the Fayûm, the Ibis-clan at Hermopolis — & so forth. As time went on, & civilisation progressed they explained away the grosser features of this creed by representing the Totem-animal as the symbol, or incarnation,

of an unseen deity.
And there is no clearer
proof of the extreme
antiquity of their civilisation
than the fact that they
had already reached
this point in their
spiritual career when
Mena, the first king
of the first dynasty,
laid the foundation
-stone of the Temple of
Ptah at Memphis.

But, you will ask,
having started from
fetishism, animal worship
& polytheism, did they

subject of His faith,
we should be startled
by the breadth & grandeur
of his views touching
the Godhead. He would
tell us that Ra was
the Great All; that by
his Word alone he called
all things into existence
— that all things are
therefore but reflections
of Himself & his will;
— that he is the creator
of day & night, of the
heavenly spheres; of
[redacted] infinite Space
that he is the eternal

not rise at last to higher things — to monotheism pure & simple.

Well, yes — they did rise to monotheism; but I am not sure that it was monotheism pure & simple. Their monotheism was not exactly our monotheism. It was a monotheism based upon, & evolved from the polytheism of earlier ages. Could we question a High Priest of ~~Thebes~~ Heliopolis of the time of the 19th or 20th Dynasty, on the

essence, invisible,
omnipresent, omniscient.
In a word, that he is
— God Almighty.

If, after this, we
could put the same
questions to a High Priest
of Memphis, we should
receive a very similar
answer; only we should
now be told that this
great divinity was Ptah.
And if we could make
the tour of Egypt, visiting
every great city, & questioning
the priests of ~~each~~ every great
Temple in turn, we should

find that each claimed these attributes of unity & universality for his own local God. All, nevertheless, would admit the identity of these various deities. They would admit that he whom they worshipped at Heliopolis as Ra was the same as he whom they worshipped at Memphis as Ptah, & at Thebes as Amen. We have proof of their catholicity in this respect. Ptah & Ra's were of course one & the same.

But Apis was also recognised as "the Soul of Osiris & the Life of Tum." Again, Amen, Knum & Sebek were made one with Ra, & became Amen-Ra, Knum-Ra, & Sebek-Ra. This, however, was but a compromise; & they never got beyond it. That individual Theologians rose to the height of pure monotheism cannot be doubted. Those who conceived & formulated the exalted pantheism of Ra-worship

cannot have failed
to go the one step
farther; but that one
step farther would
be heresy; & heresy
was not likely to leave
records for future historians
in a land where the
governing classes were
all members of the
priesthood. In a word,
it is certain — absolutely
certain — that every great
local Deity was worshipped
as the One God of his
own city or province;

It is also certain that to whatever extent these Gods were identified with one another, the Egyptians never agreed to abolish their Pantheon in favour of one — & only one — supreme deity.

There is, however, a central fact which must never be overlooked in any discussion of the religion of the old Egyptian people. They were the first in the history of the world who recognised

& held fast by, the doctrine of the immortality of the Soul. Look back as far as we will into the darkness of their past — question as closely as we may the earliest of their monuments, & we yet find them looking forward to an eternal future.

Their notions of Man, the Microcosm, were more complex

than ours. They conceived him to consist of a Body, a Soul, a Spirit, & a Ka — that Ka which I have ventured to interpret as the Life; & they held that the perfect reunion of all these parts was a necessary condition of the life to come. Hence the care with which they embalmed the body: hence the food & drink offerings

with which they nourished the Ka; hence the funerary texts with which they lined the tomb, & the funerary [illegible] which they [illegible] the [illegible] in- [illegible] Soul. [illegible] se [illegible] d [illegible] had lived a pure [illegible] & holy life in this world, & came before the judgment seat

But that re-union could not take place unless the man had

-seat of Osiris with clean hands, a clean heart, & a clean con-science).

"Glory to Thee, Oh thou Great God, Thou Lord of Truth & Justice!" says the dead Man when brought into the presence of the Eternal Judge. "Lo! I have defrauded no man of his dues. I have not oppressed the widow — I have

not borne false
witness — I have
not been slothful
— I have broken
faith with no man
— I have starved
no man — I have
slain no man — I
have not enriched
myself by unlawful
gains — I have not
given short measure
of corn — I have not
tampered with the
scales — ~~I have not~~
I have not

encroached upon my neighbour's field — I have not cut off the running water from its lawful channel — I have not turned away the food from the mouths of the fatherless. Lo! I am pure! I am pure!"

This is from the Negative Confession in the 125th Chapter of the most famous religious

Book of the Ancient Egyptians — the Book of the Dead. It gives you the measure of their standard of morality. The teachers who established that standard, & the people who endeavoured faithfully to live up to it, may have had very childish & fantastic notions on many points —

They may

in one place) have
fine gold rings in
the ears of their
sacred crocodiles —
they may have shaved
their eyebrows when
their cats died; but
as regards uprightness,
charity, justice, & mercy,
they would not, I
think, have much
to learn from us,
if they were living to
this day beside the
pleasant waters of the
Nile.

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